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ABSTRACT

Included in this booklet are content information, teaching techniques, and ways to study about the home community for geography teachers. The author suggests that the home community should be the base of operations in geographic learning at all geographic levels. The home community, the place where people have common interests, is discussed as a geographic region. The following five major elements of a community are briefly described: physical, spatial, human, cultural, and social. The elements can be studied through surveys, field trips, study of documentary materials, resource persons, map recording, preparation of pictorial and graphic materials, and participation in service projects. Suggestions for employing the techniques are provided. The use of a scientific method is proposed for studying the home community. Steps involved in the scientific method include exploring, selecting, measuring, classifying, recording, synthesizing, interpreting, and applying. The success of home community study depends on the acquaintance of teachers with the content and methodology of geography and on their concern for social improvement. (ND)

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THE HOME COMMUNITY

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The Home Community

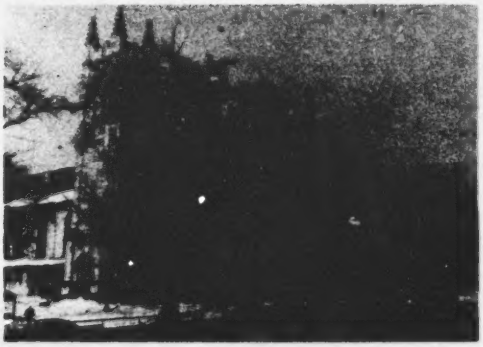
The home community is the place where people have common interests. They go to the same schools, use the same post office, shop in the same stores, join the same clubs, work in the same factories, support the same athletic teams, and read the same newspapers. In many respects the home community is the most important of all geographic regions. It should be the base of operations in geographic learning at all geographic levels. Why?

1. Studying the home community permits direct observation of natural, cultural, and social phenomena; for primary learning experiences are basic in the educational process. Children learn best by having direct contact with the things they are learning about.
2. The home community provides an identification and interpretation of relationships of observed phenomena. Perhaps no other skill in geography is as difficult or as important as the interpretations of man-landscape relationships. The community serves as the best laboratory in which to acquire that skill.
3. Home community study permits an insight into the complexity of human affairs and the intricate interrelationships involved in the process of social living.
4. The home community furnishes real-life situations. Fundamental concepts can be developed on the basis of things actually seen or heard or smelled or tasted or touched.
5. Studying the home community encourages intelligent interpretation of maps. If a map is, at times, to serve as a window through which one sees the landscape, it is desirable to have maps and make maps of observed landscapes. Possibly it can be assumed that if a pupil has had considerable exercise in the making and studying of maps of known landscapes, that ultimately a map of a remote region will in itself provide some reasonably accurate visual imagery.
6. The home community equips the child with a fund of knowledge which may be used in the development of mental imagery of far away things.
7. Studying the home community provides a basis for the comparative evaluation of communities. In making an analysis of likenesses and differences of communities, the place with which the pupil is intimately acquainted is quite naturally the core consideration in comparative evaluation.
8. The home community is the primary place where good citizenship can and should be practiced. It is here where the first fundamental steps in citizenship training are taken. The biggest problems in life for any citizen are within the visible landscape.
9. Home community study contributes to better school-community relationships. The school develops greater interest in the community, and the community shows greater concern for the school.
10. Studying the home community encourages the use of a systematic method of study. Various steps ranging from exploratory observation to the application of new understandings are involved.

Some Elements of a Community

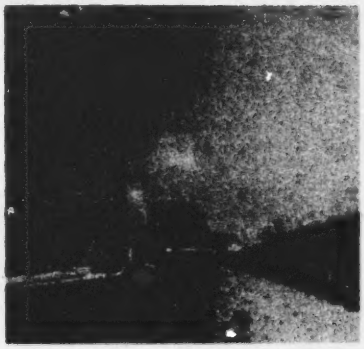
Residences

School



Church, Library, Park

Stores and Streets



Factory and Railroad

—2—

Basic Elements of a Community

The five major constituent elements of a community are: the physical, the spatial, the human, the cultural, and the social.

Physical Elements. The physical elements are the natural features. They are the natural inheritance of a community.

1. **Climate.** This factor is a vital consideration in community analysis. Particularly the seasonal characteristics of temperature and precipitation have a pronounced effect on human activity. Clothing, shelter, agricultural production, transportation, and recreational interests are but a few of the human activities intimately related to climatic conditions.

2. **Topography.** Topography ranks with climate as a physical factor significantly influencing man's thinking as to how a certain area or region may serve to optimum advantage. Topography may be related to the street or road pattern of a city, the kind of agricultural pursuits, accessibility of a community, drainage pattern, or recreational opportunities.

3. **Soil, subsoil, bedrock.** Agricultural productivity is closely related to the nature of the soil and subsoil. Soil drainage is important in both rural and urban areas. The nature and depth of bedrock may affect its utilization as a mineral resource, or subway and skyscraper construction may be conditioned thereby.

4. **Minerals.** Metallic and non-metallic minerals are important in the construction of buildings, machines, tools, transportation media, and communication devices. The mineral fuels are man's prime source of energy. Minerals contribute significantly to the character of a community.

5. **Water.** The availability of fresh water and its nature, whether surface or underground, are vital considerations in community analysis. Water is needed for domestic purposes, industrial uses, waste disposal, and at times for irrigation, recreation, transportation, and power production. Land and water relationships are often critical considerations when large cities are studied.

6. **Plants and animals.** Biotic resources have shaped the economic and social structures of some communities. Forestry, fishing, and hunting are a few of the extractive industries which may contribute to supplying distinctive community character.

Spatial Elements. These elements pertain to the size, shape, and location of a community.

1. **Location.** Where is the community? The answer to this question is of great significance. The question may be posed in a number of ways. Where is it with respect to latitude and longitude, other communities, the state, water bodies, drainage patterns, physiographic regions, economic regions (agriculture, manufacturing, recreation, etc.) climatic regions, vegetation regions, soil regions, transportation patterns, population distribution?

2. **Size.** Size is an important consideration when studying the home community. Is the community a village, a large city, a town-county combination, or a widespread open-country region? Size has a significant bearing on human associations and the kinds of services a community can render. Some communities can support hotels, theatres, hospitals, clothing stores, "dime" stores, supermarkets, and furniture stores whereas others cannot.

3. **Shape.** The shape of a community is at times conditioned by water bodies, topography, transportation facilities, land availability, or an inherited pattern. Shape often has some relationship to the efficient operation of a community.

Human Elements. Population density, age composition, sex composition, educational status, occupational status, economic status, racial pattern, nationality pattern, class structure, and organizations or associations are classed as human elements.

1. **Population density.** This involves consideration of a range from small groups of nomadic herders or hunters to great concentrations of people in large cities. The density of population contributes significantly to the character of a community.

2. **Age composition.** Old and established communities often have a different age composition than new ones. Some communities are weighted in the direction of old age, others in the direction of youth.

3. **Sex composition.** Mining communities may have a preponderance of males, whereas communities with textile industries may have a preponderance of females. Furthermore, age and sex composition are at times related. A large number of aged persons often contributes to a dominance of females.

4. **Educational status.** There is a wide variation in the amount of formal schooling attained by adults from community to community. For example, a suburb where professions are strongly represented has citizens with higher academic achievement than a community in which there are primarily factory or farm laborers.

5. **Occupational status.** The occupational status of the people is often related to the function of a community. A community may have one of the following as its primary concern—government, trade, commerce, mining, manufacturing, education, health, or recreation. Some communities are almost entirely residential. Most communities have a combination of several functions. In general, occupations may be classed as belonging to the primary or extractive economic industries such as mining, hunting, fishing, and farming; to the manufacturing industries; to the distributive industries such as trade and commerce; and to the services such as performed by teachers, lawyers, clergymen, doctors, governmental representatives, and those rendering non-professional personal services.

6. **Economic status.** The wealth of a community is reflected primarily in the quality of its residences, and the variation is great from community to community. The nature of the social organizations and the kinds of cultural and recreational facilities provided are also somewhat related to economic status.

7. **Nationality pattern.** People of the same nationality have similar backgrounds and similar interests and consequently tend to clus-

ter. The nationality groups help to define the personality of a community.

8. **Racial groups.** In communities of the United States the clustering of racial groups often gives them a definite character.

9. **Class structure.** Class structure is frequently related to economic structure. As like things tend to coalesce, so people of like race, nationality, wealth, education, or occupation tend to set themselves apart from others.

10. **Associations.** Associations grow out of similar beliefs, occupations, avocations, or interests. Kinds and numbers of associations vary significantly from community to community.

Cultural Elements. In a material sense, whatever man has put into a community, such as residences, schools, churches, libraries, parks, playgrounds, streets, railroads, airports, stores, factories, welfare institutions, and governmental buildings, belongs to the cultural element.

1. **Residences.** Residences are usually classed as single, dual, or multiple family. The quality and quantity of each have a significant bearing on the character of a community.

2. **Schools, churches, libraries.** They are the most evident educational institutions in the community. Next to the home they are the primary conditioners of man's thinking and as such play an important role in contributing to community quality.

3. **Parks and playgrounds.** These contribute greatly to the kind of recreation in a community and as such play an important role.

4. **Transportation facilities.** The part which a community can and does play in the general socio-economic structure depends to a large extent on the amount, character, and quality of agencies serving the community which are concerned with mobility.

5. **Commercial establishments.** What kind of stores does a community have? Are they large department stores and supermarkets, or is local shopping confined to a crossroads general merchandise store? These are among the questions that should be answered in community analysis.

6. **Industrial establishments.** Some communities have factories, others do not. In those that have, the kinds of factories have a pronounced effect on the structure of the community.

7. **Welfare establishments.** Hospitals and homes for the economic and socially handicapped are occasional contributors to community structure.

8. **Governmental establishments.** Town halls, county buildings, prisons, post offices, fire stations, and police stations are among the governmental establishments. Almost every community has one or more buildings housing governmental agencies.

Social Elements. In this classification the social elements are defined as human interests and activities. They make vital contributions to the personality of a community.

1. **Human thought.** When attempting to understand a community one should know what the people are thinking and talking about. Thought initiates activity.

2. **Influence of the past.** Many village or city patterns, customs of the people, ways of dress, and styles of architecture have been borrowed from the past. Consequently, understanding often requires historical study.

3. **Family life.** The family is the cornerstone of the social structure and the quality thereof is significantly related to the quality of the community.

4. **Land use.** In an analysis of a community, logical questions are: How is the land used? Could it be used to greater advantage in some other way? Is it used with due regard for wholesome conservation practices?

5. **Employment.** In community analysis, consideration should be given to the opportunities for making a living. Are these opportunities primarily with a single purpose or are they diversified? Do they seem to have a future?

6. **Communication.** The press, television, and radio are the common communication media in most communities. Are the materials they present of good quality?

7. **Beauty.** Parks, wide streets, painted buildings, trees, and flowers are a few of the things that contribute to the beauty of a community. Shoddy overhanging signs, unkept empty lots, billboards, and decrepit buildings have the opposite effect.

8. **Health and safety.** The concern of a community for the physical and mental health of its citizens must be taken into account. Accident prevention is an important consideration.

9. **Citizenship.** Democracy requires participation of the individual in civic affairs. The community benefits to the extent that it happens.

Home Community Study

After recognizing the basic elements of a community, the question quite naturally arises: How does one study it? There are a number of possibilities, such as surveys, field trips, study of documentary materials, using resource persons, recording on maps, preparing pictorial and graphic materials, and participating in service projects. In many instances a combination of several of the suggested techniques is employed.

Surveys. Surveys are of two types, those which involve a rather comprehensive overall study of a community, and those that involve a detailed analysis of one or two selected elements. The intensity of a survey in either case will depend upon the maturity of the students.

The making of a comprehensive survey is one of the most valuable of academic experiences. Such surveys acquaint students with the totality of the community structure. They expose the community problems with which the citizen must cope, increase consciousness of human interdependence, and develop opportunity for the recognition of relationships between elements of a community.

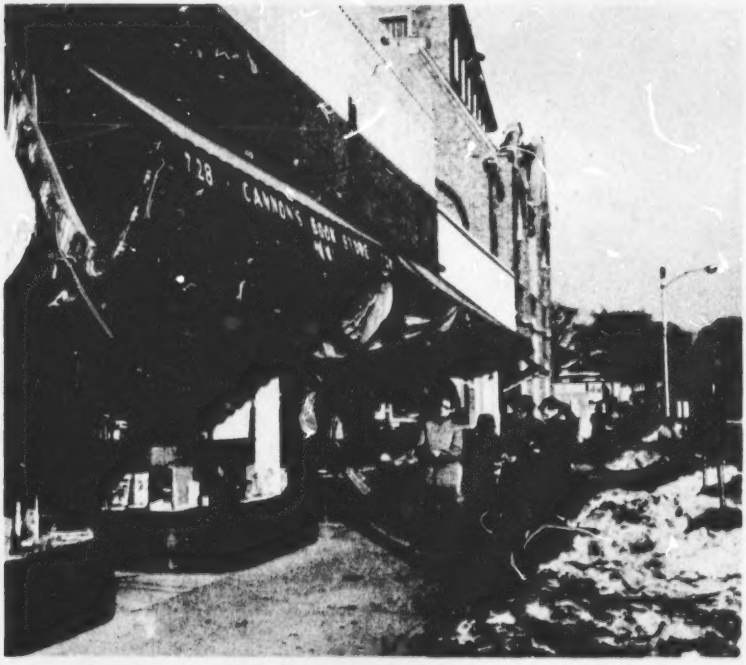
The comprehensive survey can very readily be a composite of surveys of selected elements. The surveys of selected elements can best be pursued by committees which function in a democratic fashion. For most effective survey work several fundamentals must be considered.

1. Clearly define the purpose of the survey.
2. Carefully select the elements of the community to be surveyed.
3. Let the people of the community be the prime focus of attention.
4. Do not let the survey exceed the tolerance of community mores.
5. Select judiciously the techniques to be employed in the survey.
6. Gather data with care and caution.
7. Make the data as palatable as possible through stories, pictures, maps, graphs, diagrams, and models.
8. Synthesize the work of the various committees.
9. Present the accumulated materials first to the class, then to the community.

The people of the community can be made acquainted with the results of the survey through an "open-house" at the school, printed reports, and programs presented to community organizations.

The "School Correspondence" program of Junior Red Cross provides an excellent outlet for survey materials. Through an exchange of community studies a dual purpose is served, for pupils are encouraged to do a high quality job on presenting survey results of their own community, and they learn about a different kind of community quite remote from theirs.

Field Trips. Field trips are organized excursions which ordinarily have a single major objective. In the home community it may be concentrated



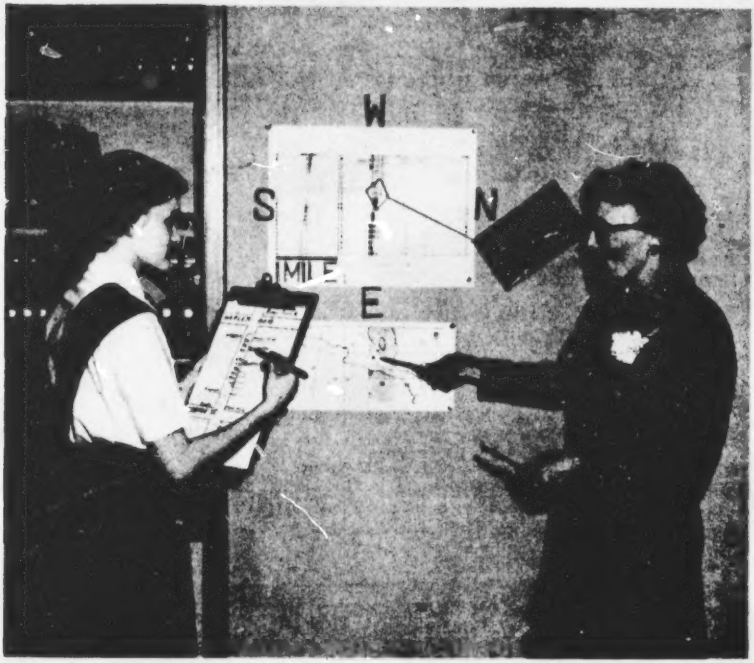
Teacher helping students see relationships in the community.

interest in factory products, transportation facilities, governmental agencies, museums, zoos, or farms. For example, there may be a trip to a lumber mill, a dairy, an airport, a police station, or a truck farm. The advantages obtained from field trips are numerous.

1. They provide for primary learning experiences.
2. They encourage learning through a variety of sense perceptions.
3. They give new meaning to regularly observed phenomena.
4. They arouse curiosity about the immediate environment.
5. They enrich the process of instruction.

For effective field trips several fundamental considerations are imperative.

1. The trip must be planned carefully.
2. The pupil must be prepared for the trip so that the experiences can be quite meaningful.
3. A printed guide sheet often has merit in that it will aid students in making closer observations.
4. Contacts must be made with the people who make the trip a reality and contribute to the educational process.
5. Consideration should be given to the physical needs of the students.



Locating interdependent features on maps.

6. Arrangements must be made for insured transportation and adequate supervision.
7. The students should be kept aware of the need for recording and reporting information gathered during the trip.

Studying Documentary Material. Some types of information essential to the study of the home community are not apparent to the senses. Consequently, documentary materials must be a source of information. This is particularly true when information is needed about the physical and spatial elements and many of the human elements. For example, climatic data can be found in the publications of the U.S. Weather Bureau. Information pertaining to soil, subsoil, bedrock, minerals, topography, and drainage is usually provided by the State Geological Survey or some other agency of the government. Much of the material needed for an analysis of the human elements, such as population number, age, sex, education, occupation, nationality, race, and selected economic factors can be found in the Bureau of the Census reports. Some cities have their own yearbooks. The records and publications of business organizations and civic associations are valuable sources of information. Materials produced by planning commissions and zoning boards can be used to advantage.

Using Resource Persons. Resource persons are people with special abilities, skills, or understandings who can contribute information of value in community study. Resource persons can either be brought to the school or

representatives of the school can go to them. The former plan has the advantage of having more students establish contact with the person. There are definite advantages to using resource persons.

1. Students learn that sources of information can be many and varied.
2. It is a wholesome form of adult-student relationship.
3. It is a vital experience particularly when a field trip is not possible.

Who are good resource persons? That depends on the purpose of the lecture or discussion. The following, however, are some that should be considered—early settlers, librarians, newspaper editors, public officials, farmers, industrial managers, labor leaders, scientific workers, ministers, health officials, and social workers.

Recording on Maps. Recording data is a basic experience in the learning process, and much of the information gathered in the interest of community study can be put on maps. This is particularly true of the spatial and cultural elements. Nothing is better than a map to show size, shape, and location of a community. Recording the cultural elements on a base provided by the teacher will result in a land-use map.

Recording cultural information on a large scale map of a few "square blocks" surrounding the school can start in the primary grades. This procedure contributes significantly to developing the powers of observation. In the higher grades the map base of a larger area, or possibly the total community, can be used for the recording of data. Recording the data is relatively simple when compared with the interpretation of relationships of the various kinds of information put on the map. The map is probably the most compact device for the recording and the most lucid device for the revealing of information.

Preparing Pictorial and Graphic Materials. Pictures and graphs have the advantages of making things vivid and concise. Graphs are particularly useful in presenting quantitative and comparative data.

The two most useful types of pictures for home community study are those of the past that may serve in the historical study of the community, and those of the present that offer a vivid portrayal of the existing scene. If pictures are not available, they should be taken. However, selection of things to be photographed in the interest of honest portrayal is itself an art.

Graphs can be used to spectacular advantage in portraying such things as population growth, age and sex composition, occupations, farm production, governmental receipts and expenditures, and other items.

Service Projects. Service projects are student group activities designed to promote civic welfare. Although they must be handled with tact, they are democracy in action and as such deserve to be promoted.

What are community service projects in which students could engage to the mutual benefit of both? Here are a few. Suggested traffic regulations for streets adjacent to the school. Study and report on methods of increasing recreational opportunities. Contribute to the beauty of a community by cleaning unsightly places, planting trees, and urging the removal of billboards. Present information that will encourage conservation of natural resources.

Service projects are usually most successful when the teachers ally themselves with the constructive forces of a community.

Use of a Scientific Method

The use of a scientific method is often considered an important and basic learning procedure. For the study of the home community the following steps are suggested: exploration, selection, measurement, classification, recording, synthesis, interpretation, application.

Exploration. The home community is within the realm of student experience. Exploration is a basic step in learning to know the home community and in gaining a balanced or proportionate picture of it. Prior to an intensive community study there should be some conditioning as to what to look for and at. Most successful explorers are at least partially directed by anticipations. Systematic exploration requires preliminary planning. Fortunately, most students like to explore, consequently little added motivation is needed to embark on this first step in community study.

Selection. Not all phenomena within a community are significant elements to be incorporated into an evolving picture. A careful selection must be made of those which are. They are the ones that require concentrated attention.

Measurement. Understanding requires comparative evaluation. Comparative evaluation requires measurement, both qualitative and quantitative. Practically every facet of the community structure must be measured if it is to be understood and to be incorporated into the total community picture.

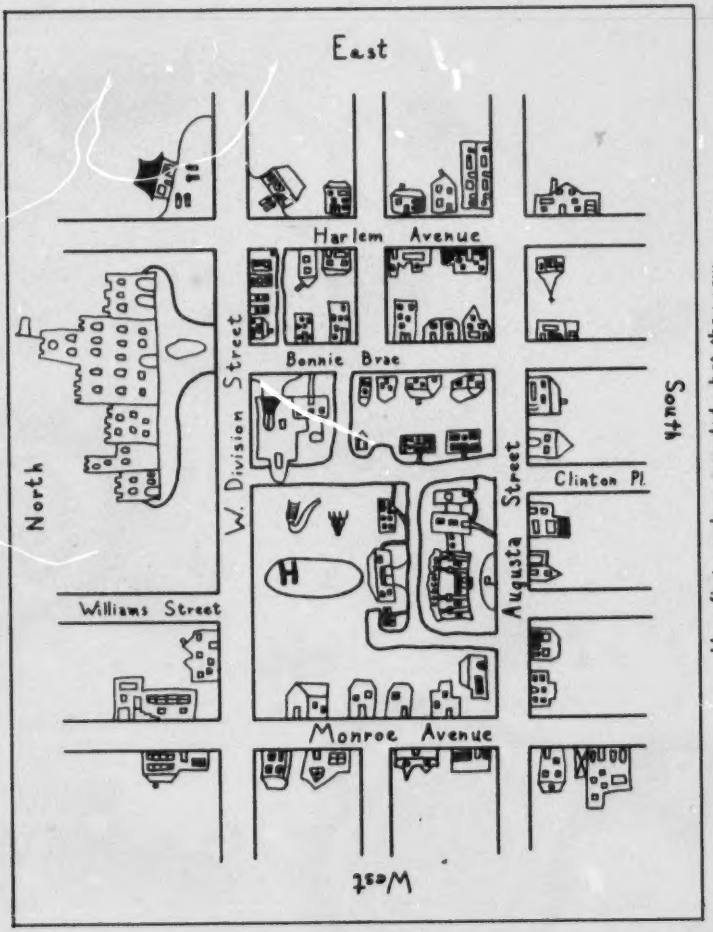
Classification. After the elements of a community have been identified, selected, and measured, they should be classified. They can be classified according to the categories previously mentioned—physical, spatial, human, cultural, social.

Recording. Recording may be descriptive, pictorial, graphic, or cartographic. Description must be accurate, clear, and concise. Pictorial recording is vivid, but it must be balanced and normal, otherwise it may lead to false concepts. Graphic recording is particularly useful in making quantitative concepts meaningful. Map recording is especially applicable when observed landscape phenomena are under consideration.

Synthesis. How are the elements of a community related? A correct understanding of a community requires an answer to this question. One does not acquire a true picture of a community from an identification of the separate elements, correct as they may be. A community is a complexity of many interacting elements, and an attempt must be made to present them in a related sense.

Interpretation. Interpretation is difficult and delicate, yet an absolute essential. It involves the recognition, understanding, and appreciation of the many relationships which contribute to the community tapestry. Without interpretation the community lacks meaning and all previous effort is somewhat futile. Interpretation of recorded material can be best achieved if its modes of derivation are understood. Interpretation involves training and practice.

Application. Learning is futile unless it is accompanied by a sense of responsibility. Wanting to do something about a situation is basic to good citizenship. Doing it is citizenship.



How first graders recorded what they saw.

Some Basic Convictions

The success of home community study will depend to a great extent on the acquaintance of teachers with geography, its content and its method, and on a sincere concern for social improvement. The "know what and how and why" must be accompanied by an intense devotion to human welfare if there is to be social progress. The basic convictions for the study of the home community are:

1. The home community is a laboratory that is unsurpassed in the quantity and quality of contributions it can make to the educational process.
2. The home community is a reality which encourages primary learning activities. Association with this technique contributes significantly to the efficient acceptance of life's responsibilities.
3. The home community permits a study of what people have, what they believe, and what they do. Good citizenship requires the ability to interpret all three in a related sense.
4. The home community, by its presence, permits comprehension of its structure. It provides incentives for democratic action. It creates frequent opportunities for the application of acquired skills in social living.
5. The home community should be studied at all grade levels. It is a laboratory in which a systematic method of learning can be applied. Obviously the quantity of material and complexity of its integration increase with academic maturation.

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